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Saudi Aramco and the Politics of Cultural Heritage

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Saudi Aramco and the Politics of Cultural Heritage

By

Anahid Hanounik Huth

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
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2014

This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern
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ABSTRACT

Saudi Aramco and the Politics of Cultural Heritage

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MA, Middle Eastern Studies

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April 30, 2014

Culture Heritage in recent decades has become a catch word within world discourse. It is increasingly receiving generous attention in both money and time from private and public sectors on preservation policy. The application of so-called preservation and restoration projects, the alleged care for Cultural Heritage, has become a motive and battle cry of UNESCO, World Bank, private companies, banks, NGOs, European Council, and Western governments' foreign policy. This leads us to ask what is behind this increasing attention, and whether we should see it as Christina Luke 2013 suggested in her article—is Heritage increasingly being seen as a soft power for advancing certain geopolitical agendas in international policy arsenal? I will be looking at Saudi Aramco as a particular example to argue that that culture heritage is being used as such a political tool and that therefore we should be very skeptical of heritage development schemes, examine critically the use of heritage-related political scheme, and try to identify and understand what motivations or what other policies are behind them. Through the case study of Saudi Aramco I will examine the motivation and agenda being advanced in preservation and restoration of culture heritage in Saudi Arabia.

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RELEVANCE

Given the importance of and interest in the preservation, conservation and management of culture heritage, it is remarkable that organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank, as well as government and non-government organizations, do not provide clear reasons for their activities in this field. In studying Saudi Aramco, which unsurprisingly given the context of modern Saudi history, it exemplifies the microcosm of the larger intertwined agendas of Saudi Arabia and the United States. I will try to demonstrate how Saudi Aramco as a “double agent”, uses the preservation of cultural heritage to construct images in the mind of the public for political goals. Saudi Aramco, in using this tool, is seeking to expand its presence abroad politically and geographically. At the same time as a longtime agent for United States, Saudi Aramco is seeking reconciliation and legitimatization of U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia, thus justifying U.S. foreign policy at home. In order to make this argument I will first follow the history of Saudi Aramco and then the history of its involvement in cultural projects, finishing with a critical examine of two of its projects on cultural heritage. Through the example of Saudi Aramco I argue that we may see heritage as a tool for advancing foreign policy. As a result we should be wary of heritage development schemes, and we should critically examine their usage, trying to identify what motivations or what other policies are being or will be advanced by them. In addition to the above topic I intended to examine the following issues:

- The making of tangible heritage by giving them new narration and its conditions and outcomes as seen by UNESCO and its cooperative

agencies to improve the quality of life of the individuals.

- The importance of projects that Saudi Aramco, together with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA), is undertaking to foster their political policy.
- The United States and European States (Germany and France) foreign policies with Saudi Arabia and why they pursued such projects.

METHODOLOGY

My thesis will have the format of a literature review combined with that of a hypothesis development. Accordingly, the main chapters will be devoted to the various actors involved in culture heritage preservation management. I will look at the view of previous authors and adapt it to my case study and will offer new insights, notably by presenting the motives and actions of Saudi Aramco in the context. To this end, I will make extensive use of available sources. The theses will include chapters and sections on two culture heritage restoration and management projects that Saudi Aramco has been managing and promoting, as well as an attempt at re-evaluation the political agenda at work behind heritage projects, as well as final chapter counting conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Culture Heritage in recent decades has become a catch phrase within world discourse. It is increasingly receiving generous attention in both money and time from private and public sectors regarding preservation policy. As an example of the application of so-called preservation and restoration projects, the alleged care for Cultural Heritage became a motive and battle cry in our world. David Lowenthal states that “[a]ll at once heritage is everywhere...in everything from galaxies to genes. It is the chief forces of patriotism and a prime lure of tourism”¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1972 convention for the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage calls on the participation of the international community to protect heritages of outstanding universal value. UNESCO World Heritage Center argues that the goals of preservation, conservation, and protection of cultural heritage should enhance dialogue, peace, and civil society between its members and foster sustainable development that will result in stability, democracy and human dignity. These goals would be accomplished by pursuing scientific cooperation (scientific cooperation brings scientists from different fields and related participants together to discuss scientific advancements on global arena) to strengthen the relations between nations and organizations. The concern of losing the knowledge of cultural heritage in a globalized world led UNESCO to claim worldwide responsibility for documenting and managing cultural heritage by engaging government and non-government organizations and agencies to participate in these projects.²

World Heritage Cities Programme, for example, is meant to restore and

¹ Lowenthal, pp. xii-xvii

² UNESCO World Heritage

rehabilitate historic structures and public spaces of historical cities around the world to stimulate economic and cultural development. The Historic Urban Landscape Initiative set up by UNESCO included international working group ICOMOS, IUCN, and ICCROM and other partners such as International Union of Architects (UIA), Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA), the World Bank, UN Habitat, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (ORCD), the J. Paul Getty Foundation and World Monument Fund (WMF) as well as many experts in other fields. UNESCO and the Foundation Franz Weber of Switzerland signed an agreement in 2013 to protect the Dja Faunal Reserve in Cameroon and preserve the site's biodiversity through encouraging involvement of local communities in managing the property and to improve the indigenous people's living conditions. Recently UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme claimed cultural routes such as Slave Routes (which provide a memorial itinerary in the regions and countries marked by being slavery source)³ as world heritage and important travel destinations that could develop local economy and prosperity. John Collins gives a good example of the reconstruction of such a route in Bahia state in Brazil that involves France Ministry Affairs, SIRCHSL for-profit heritage firm.⁴ Culture Heritage in this case is crossing the border of the project from the national to international arena. Lowenthal argues that heritage in itself is a good thing; it gives us refuge and with traditions, it supports us from the unknown. However, he also criticizes heritage for being

³ UNESCO World Heritage Centre

⁴ See Collins.

“oppressive, defeatist, [and] decadent.”⁵ This leads us to ask what is behind this increasing attention, and if we should see as Luke (2013) suggested as a soft power for advancing certain geopolitical agendas in the international policy arsenal. Should we view heritage as a soft power? Has it in fact been used this way? How has cultural heritage been used politically? Is cultural heritage’s political usage a new idea in our time?

In fact, the linkages between politics and archaeology have long been documented. In her recent analysis Luke describes the strategy of Turkish and American culture activity in endorsing and funding selective cultural programs, especially in the Balkan area, fostering their own countries ‘foreign political agendas. Luke argues that Turkey co-sponsored the *National Strategy of the Alliance of Civilization* to renovate Ottoman legacy and Muslim Communities in the Balkans.⁶ Turkey has changed some cultural regulations to enable its NGOs such as International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) and Pious Foundations, which oversee renovation and rehabilitation projects built during the Ottoman era in and outside Turkey, to participate in cultural heritage initiatives abroad. This resulted in a positive increase of resources and agreeable policy, the participation of TIKA with UNESCO World Heritage inscriptions along with the Council of Europe, and Ambassadors Fund is remarkable in the region of Sandzak, where important cultural heritage is derived from its multi-ethnic, multi-religious ‘sacral and profane building’ in Novi Pazar city marking the cross point of East-West culture. However TIKA projects actually concentrated on the Islamic past throughout the Balkans. In doing this, Luke argues, that Turkey’s political goal in the

⁵ Lowenthal, pp. xii-xvii.

⁶ Luke, p. 354, Cited from the organization mission.

preservation of an Islamic heritage monument in the Balkans is to drive attention for the Muslim minority situation in the area and Turkey's Ottoman past. At the same time TIKA is representing Turkey as a fully developed country that can give help to underdeveloped one. However Turkey's approach differs from the American and European Union culture policy in the Balkan region, as Luke argues. For them the importance of the restoration and preservation of heritage in the Balkans lay in emphasizing multiculturalism and tolerance between ethnic and religious diversities which could lead to "reconciliation and EU integration."⁷ The carefully endorsed projects of Islamic heritage in the Balkans, and Armenian and Jewish heritage in Turkey by the USA and EU through their agents UDAID, UNDP and the Ambassadors' Fund for Cultural Preservation are tailored to foster tolerance between religious and ethnic communities. Luke argues that by doing this, "cultural heritage represents and increasingly politicized medium."⁸ She added that the cooperation between agents and the host country "to allow for the rehabilitation of spaces associated with contested histories provides opportunities for stakeholder groups to leverage culture capital that endorses specific agendas that are in line with their respective foreign policies."⁹

It is clear that the usage of cultural heritage in politics is not a new; many scholars have recognized the intersection of cultural archaeology and imperial power, ethnicity, and nationalism. Scholars have traced the use of cultural heritage in redefining sense of identity, place, and political relations to antiquity. Nathanael J. Andarde explains how Roman and Greek empires used material objects, signs, and cultural performances to

⁷ Luke, p. 359.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

stress social categories, experience, and orientations within their socio-political framework. He clarifies how meaning of these materials was changed as subjects give them new significance in different contexts or endow them simultaneously with multiple overlapping saliences.¹⁰ Other scholars such as Neil Asher Silberman linked the history of archaeology engagement to American Biblical exploration and colonial empires search in the Middle East as they fought with each other over the properties of crumbling Ottoman Empire.¹¹ Colonialism affected archaeology in stressing some questions and dropping others to offer historical justification for their colonial interest. Scholars recently offered an extensive diversity of theoretical discourse and ideas to clarify the impact of colonialism, nationalism, and globalism on archaeological practices. This leads us to think of how nations can gain economic prosperity and political domination without engaging in military conflict in our present-day globally interconnected world.

Cultural heritage is a way in which geopolitical strategies can be enacted by a vehicle other than the government, such as NGOs and private corporations whose interest is allied with government interest. Corporations as new empires became strong actors in geopolitical discourse. In studying Saudi Armco, which unsurprisingly given the context of modern Saudi history, it exemplifies the microcosm of the larger intertwined agendas of Saudi Arabia and the United States. I will try to demonstrate how Saudi Aramco as a “double agent,” uses the preservation of cultural heritage to construct images in the mind of the public for political goals. Saudi Aramco, in using this tool, is seeking to expand its presence abroad politically and geographically. At the same time as a longtime agent for United States, Saudi Armco is seeking reconciliation and legitimatization of U.S.

¹⁰ Andrade, pp.1-10

¹¹ Silberman, p. 19.

presence in Saudi Arabia, thus justifying U.S. foreign policy at home. In order to make this argument I will first follow the history of Saudi Aramco and then the history of its involvement in cultural projects, finishing with a critical examine of two of its projects on cultural heritage. Through the example of Saudi Aramco I argue that we may see heritage as a tool for advancing foreign policy. I will elaborated how Saudi Aramco by doing these things is helping reinforce American policy and particular rights which links back to the history of Aramco as a collaborative sort of collaborator with the U.S. government at the same time enhancing Saudi Arabia foreign policy as a national company. As a result we should be wary of heritage development schemes, and we should critically examine their usage, trying to identify what motivations or what other policies are being or will be advanced by them.

Politicking Culture Heritage

Objects have no meaning unless someone or some groups apply a certain meaning to them. Therefore, many have noted that heritage does not have essentially authentic value, but it is a political construction process of the past to justify the present and the future. Bauer argues that “claiming something as one’s cultural heritage has powerful legal, political, practical, and moral dimensions, all of which interact in the process by which a people, group, or society identifies itself and its unique characteristics.”¹² Cultural icons are object that “defines the culture, ideal, and achievements of people who created them, who use them, who live with them.”¹³ Scholars have been critical for the internal way that the history of archaeology was presented in defining those objects. Meskell argues that archaeological practices in postcolonial era in Egypt related to the

¹² Bauer, p.8.

¹³ Meskell, p. 557.

hegemonic practices of colonialism in the Middle East.¹⁴ Many Scholars agree that through studying postcolonial studies, the history of antiquity is linked to the colonialist discourse.

Postcolonial discourse has indicated that colonial enterprise was a unified entity of economic, political, culture, and educational system that helped Western states to succeed in colonizing others. Colonial enterprise is the whole system of intellectual studies that preceded and accompanied the colonial state in the colonized countries. Edward Said describes this enterprise as “Orientalism” which he defined it as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.”¹⁵ And as a “political doctrine willed over the orient”¹⁶, the Orient he argues “is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.”¹⁷ The Orient has to be studied and redefined and presented in a scientific way that could serve the European interests. This could be done only by creating a network of research institutions in Orient (mostly Middle East) which present a kind of think tank approach. As said explained, “Orientalism expresses and represents that part [Orient] culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.”¹⁸ This is clearly a kind of institutionalization of the way that the West regarded

¹⁴ Meskell, 2002, p.147.

¹⁵ Said, p. 3.

¹⁶ Said, p. 204.

¹⁷ Said, p.1.

¹⁸ Said, p. 2.

the modern East as disconnected from its past and the civilized ancient Orient as connected of Modern Anglo-American European present. This can justify the appropriation of culture objects from colonized places, but it didn't refer to the connections between the colonial expansion and the archaeological practices as a scientific discipline,

In Africa and Asia, the development of archaeology during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was clearly related to the political and economic interests of Western nations. It is not therefore surprising that the most famous archaeologists from this period were men in government service such as the French consul Paul Emile Botta or the Englishmen Austen Henry Layard and Mortimer Wheeler.¹⁹

As the function of Archaeologists grew and opened their own institutions they were indirectly representing their countries' policy. While the European archaeologists follow the imperial models, American archaeologists worked under the rubric of missionaries despite their equivalent to colonial archaeology practiced by the European. The missionaries expanded their knowledge of technology to locals which make it easier to contain and change them. These uses of modernization technology, Silberman argues, make it possible for the birth of American "Biblical archaeology" in the end of nineteenth century in the Middle East. The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) were established, and by the end of nineteenth century the rules of Biblical Archaeology were rewritten "to accommodate a wide coalition of groups—each with their specific orientations—within a single, evolving intellectual enterprise."²⁰ The establishment of ASOR in the Middle East facilitated the American expansion in the area, and the

¹⁹ Moro-Abadia, p.11.

²⁰ Silberman, p.180.

theological concept of the Bible “now became an archaeological and cartographic reality”²¹

This notion of the interest in the ancient civilizations came with the new scientific invention and the self-identification. Meskell argues that “the colonial practices of taxonomizing and controlling both present and past [was possible] through scientific discourses such as cartography, geography, and archaeology.”²² The Orient has to be demarcated and identified with a new narrative to make it fascinating for the Western interests. As the cradle of civilization, the remains of ancient civilizations and the search to prove bible epic could be used to generate this new narrative within geographical boundary. McAlister argues that “moral geographies are deeply historical and highly contested products, forged at the nexus of state power, cultural productions, and sedimented presumption.”²³ Therefore archaeologists increased in the area as they were the instrument to highlight history while obliterated and silenced others. The artefact and the archaeological funds in the Holy land did not have any meaning, meaning would be added to them to “illustrate a wide range of theological, ideological—an ultimately political-themes.”²⁴

This was revealed in the way that the history of the objects of ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization, as well as Greek and Roman were dimmed and irreducible and rewritten to fit the western narrative. Bahrani clearly shows that the imperialists’ presentation of the Mesopotamia was seen from essentialism perspective which could not be separated from politics and ideology. European saw the remains of

²¹ Silberman, p.180.

²² Meskell, 2002, p.147.

²³ MacAlister, p.5.

²⁴ Silberman, p.180.

Eastern civilizations as their property and related them to their progressive present; therefore, politicization of selected Mesopotamian objects and identity was required to consider Mesopotamia “the poetic of Western historical narrative.”²⁵

Poetic narratives were combined with rational and intellectual discourse of evolutionary perspective to give them legitimacy.²⁶ As Said argues that “[t]he interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meanings of Orientalism is a constant one, and since the late eighteenth century there has been a considerable, quite disciplined—perhaps even regulated—traffic between the two.”²⁷ The intellectual adoption gave colonizers legitimacy for the construction of Mesopotamia as the origin and starting point of the civilised world history specifically the modern western history denying any relevant between the contemporary people of the Orient with their civilized past. The contemporary people of the Orient were seen as savage, barbaric and uncivilized, such narration serves to

disassociate the past of the region from its present and to present it instead as primitive stage in the evolution of mankind [facilitating] the concept of “Mesopotamia” as the rightful domain of the West, both in a historical and a geopolitical sense. A separation and division of ((Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian) cultures and an exclusion of the later history of the region was successfully articulated through the act of naming.²⁸

The makings of territories accompanied by imagining communities²⁹ led people to think about differences and relevancies between each other. These differences and relevancies were best resonate in the postcolonial archaeology.

²⁵ Bahrani, p.161.

²⁶ Trigger, p. 356.

²⁷ Said, p. 3.

²⁸ Bahrani, p.168.

²⁹ Anderson, p. 15.

Postcolonial criticism highlights the exclusiveness of the heritage by including and excluding groups in the formation process of its narrative of identity, “collective identities are formed through claims of mutual attachment to a particular history that is materialized in certain objects, places and traditions.”³⁰ Within the states themselves, this has led to the development of an alternative nationalists discourse in counter position to the colonial discourse that had been dominant through the mid twentieth century. Heritage became the dissonance discourse between different social groups that claim the same place, history, and tradition within different narratives.³¹

Heritage and identity intertwined to claim a political homogeneity for the national interest. The past has to be rewritten to produce a unified national identify through choosing specific representation of heritage from that past to legitimize it.³² Mitchell pointed to the political narrative of the Egyptian Pharaonic heritage to build the modern nation state of Egypt,

For a few more years, a group of conservative writers with culture ties to Europe continued to insists on the significance of the of nation’s Pharaonic origins. But they did so as part of an argument against northern Europeans who insisted on the Oriental and therefore backward character of Egypt, and against local intellectuals who insisted on the exclusively Islamic character of their society. The writers’ concern was to show that Egypt was a modern, Western nation, a view to be proven by the fact that the west’s own past lay within Egypt. The significance of the past for these writers was not so much that it gave the nation a distinct and authentic identity, but that it showed that the nation belonged to the larger community of the West, and was therefore modern. The role of the past, in Dirks’s phrase, was to serve as a sign of the modern.³³

³⁰ Aykan, p.4.

³¹ Luke, p.56

³² Mitchell, p. 183.

Here postcolonial Heritage discourse is the need to disrupt and overthrow the colonial heritage to generate a new future.

Postprocessualism archaeological theory positioned cultural and social diversity as focal. This created new differences and political identities. The advancement of communication, the rise of the business of tourism, and the increase of immigration, led to more global interaction and homogeneity. However, the rise of new states and the attribution of new meanings for local ideals within some states led to diversities which can be negotiated. This idea was explained by Benedict Anderson with his imagined communities. Kymilcka argues that multiculturalism or cultural mosaic could offer a history for the global present and prospective futures.³⁴ Many argue that ethnic and religious diversities existed in the Middle East region all the time under cultural unity which can be claimed any time. Archaeologists can give a multiple meanings to the same sign linking them to a special golden age.³⁵

This discussion of territories is meant to help us understand the projects that have been undertaken by Saudi Aramco and to understand the interest of Saudi Aramco in culture heritage. Before discussing Saudi Aramco's involvement in cultural heritage and its cultural politics it is important to describe a brief history of the way that Saudi Arabia and Aramco evolved and how America was an important partner in stabilizing them. This context is important for our understanding of Saudi Aramco and its current projects and its involvement in culture policy. In order to understand what Saudi Aramco is, as quasi state or state within a state kind of organization, it is important to understand how the Saudi state came to be in the first place and how it was created.

³⁴ Kymilcka, p. 9.

³⁵ Meskell, 1998, p. 9.

The Birth of a Kingdom

The Arabian Peninsula has a steppe and desert landscape with some oases that provide water for cultivation. Society was divided into *Bedouin* (tribes) depending on kinship and ruled by a chieftain and *Hadari* (settlers) who were living in the oases as cultivators and craftsman. The power in the oases was divided between the chieftain and the religious family who obtained their power through prestige, arbitration between the tribes, and trade.³⁶ They obtained knowledge by interaction with “traders along the trade routes”³⁷ between Yemen in the south and Byzantium and Sasanians in the north and sea routes connecting west coast of the Gulf with India and Africa. This makes Arabia the hub of these routes.³⁸ Trade, migration for water, and Islamic expansion always changed its boundaries. It came under the Ottoman Empire until the end of the World War I. However, central Arabia was left to be ruled by its local *emirs* (princes) and *sheikhs* in the oases and tribal confederations on the periphery, giving way for the rise of Wahhabism, a doctrine that called for a strict *shari’a*. Founded by Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, aligned with Muhammad ibn Saud, ruler of small market town (Dir’iyya), both “clearly understood the political goal they sought, the establishment of a single polity in the area that would unite the warring towns, villages, and tribes into a realm with one imam and where the *shari’a* would reign supreme.”³⁹ However their expansion was defeated after they occupied Mecca. The Egyptian army forced them into exile in Kuwait. At the end of the 19th century Wahhabism was revived by a new member of Saud family, Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Saud who then started his expansion. In 1902 he occupied Riyadh with the help of

³⁶ Hourani, p.10 -11.

³⁷ Hourani, p. 12.

³⁸ Hourani, p. 14-15.

³⁹ Al-Fahad, in Vitalis, p.43.

Ikhwan and Britain, which signed a protectorate with him in 1916. By the end of World War I Saudi Arabia was out of the Sykes–Picot agreement and it was hardly touched by any archaeological plundering, until the waterworks by Crane who first discovered the existence of oil in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁰ In 1931 Ibn Saud was recognized by the United States and in 1932 he announced himself a king and declared his state in 1933 after many conquests. Boundaries were drawn according to Bahra and Hadda agreement with Britain who controlled Iraq and Transjordan, and protected Kuwait. In 1933 the King signed a concession with Standard Oil of California to search for oil in the kingdom after long negotiations. His kingdom started to flourish with the discovery of oil in 1938 and the growing need for oil in World War II. The search for oil led to many archaeological discoveries by Aramco employees and their families.⁴¹ The conflicts in the region and American recognition of Israel put the relationship in question, but, it had little effect on the King who needed power and money to keep his kingdom despite his pan-Arabism support. Oil was not only vital for economic prosperity giving the kingdom political leverage in the region, but also the main interest for the Americans, giving, the United States the right to control the region. Standard Oil of California became Arab American Oil Company (Aramco) in 1944.⁴² Aramco managers became very important not only in building the oil company and working as US diplomats in the kingdom, as they were also private advisors to the king. This is very important to understand US-Saudi Arabia relations especially when the U.S. intervened when oil production decreased in the war and Saudi Arabia was in deficit due to rapid government spending in the 1950s. The Cold

⁴⁰ See Palmer.

⁴¹ Potts, p.191.

⁴² <http://www.saudiaramco.com>

War drew the Saudi king further into his relationship with the Americans; Truman's containment theory was effective into holding the Saudis against communist expansion in the region. However, the Eisenhower administration pushed King Saud who succeeded his father in 1953 to ally himself with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Workers' unrest in the kingdom and the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry drove the Americans to influence the government to put them down fearing nationalization as had happened in Iran. However, the positive role that the Americans played in Suez Crisis repaired the relation between Saud and Eisenhower. The Tapeline and oil security and Syrian crisis in 1957, led Saud to decide to renew the U.S. base in Dhahran. Saudi Arabia was not ready to play a big role in the region when the Egyptian-Syrian unification in 1958 took place under Arab nationalism affecting Saudi relations with the U.S. However the Saudi feared the revolution in Yemen and started their anti-revolution propaganda which led to Abdel Nasser's attack in 1962 (Nasser was supporting the revolution in Yemen military against the Imam).⁴³ Under pressure from Aramco President John F. Kennedy sent a fleet to protect American interest in the region. In 1963 under pressure from Aramco King Faisal refused to nationalize the oil industry; in return they promised to support him and give some funding for infrastructure. Faisal agreed on the "don't ask don't tell" policy which enabled Aramco to be the decision maker in the kingdom. In 1970 Saudi Arabia received a huge military aid form the United States as part of Nixon strategy. However, the 1973 war and the decision of King Faisal to participate in the oil embargo protesting American support of Israel led to soaring oil prices and a rift in the relationship. This started the process of nationalization of Aramco

⁴³ Vitalis, p. 228.

which ended in 1980.

The oil embargo gave Saudi Arabia a chance to claim its national resources and, Americans, fearing for further reaction pressed Israel to negotiate. 1979 brought repercussions on Saudi Arabia, creating a new regional imbalance and deepening the link between the Arab-Israeli and Persian Gulf arenas. As Lesch claimed, 1979 accelerated the “balkanization”, creating a return to historical regionalism, where the states searched for self-interest and adhered to sub-regional grouping. Arabs were shattered into different blocs; Saudi Arabia took the lead in forming the GCC. The Iranian revolution, the Grand Mosque events in Riyadh and the riots in al-Hasa, American hostages, Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the Afghan war followed by Iran-Iraq war and the second oil shock affected both the United States and Saudi Arabia politics. Those events led Saudi Arabia to support Saddam against Iran and the Islamic Mujahedeen against Russia in Afghanistan, cooperating with the Americans. However, this led to Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait and the rise of Islamic terrorist groups such as al-Qaida against the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf war in 1991, leading to the 9/11 terrorist attack.⁴⁴ This terror attack created a rift in the relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia as the attackers were mostly Saudi citizens. Saudis tried to repair the relation by increasing the number of Saudi students at American universities to the United States and working together with the U.S. government to fight terrorism. In recent years Saudi Arabian involvement in the region’s conflicts and the threat of Iranian expansion have led Saudis to try to enhance their image in the United States. This will be seen by its culture heritage program aimed mostly to repair its relations with the United States and expand its

⁴⁴ Lesch, p. 3.

business in Europe by finding new allies. Saudi Aramco, the heart of the Saudi economy will always be the drive of its politics. US-Saudi relations from the 1980s until now, was marked with the “negotiation of oil prices, joint convert ventures across African and Asia,” combined by “Arms sales, military bases, military assistance, petrodollar recycling, and petrochemical projects.”⁴⁵

Saudi Aramco in History and Policy

*[Aramco is] an “Octopus” whose tentacles “extended into almost every domain and phase of the economic life of Saudi Arabia.”*⁴⁶

Before proceeding it is important to give a brief history of Aramco and how it became to exist. In the beginning of the 20th and the innovation of automobiles and technology, imperial states started searching for resources. Britain and France had already divided the Middle East in Sykes-Picot agreement, leaving the Americans out of equation. However, Americans were in the area in the form of missionaries and trade accord under British protection. Conflicts started to pick up when oil was found in Iraq and Kuwait. American oil companies reached an agreement with British and French companies in San Remo Petroleum Agreement of 1920. 1921 under “Open Door” policy American oil companies started to search for new sources. Standard Oil Company of California (SoCal) became very active in the area and approached ibn Saud for concessions.⁴⁷

SoCal had already started work in Bahrain and established Bahrain Petroleum Co. (BAPCO) when they found oil 1932. This helped SoCal to sign a concession with Abdul-‘Aziz ibn Saud who had already good relations with the American missionaries and who

⁴⁵ Vitalis, p. 272.

⁴⁶ Vitalis, p.171.

⁴⁷ See Palmer.

thought to depart from British colonialism to American exceptionalism. 1933 SoCal signed a concession with ibn Saud. The concession gave total freedom for SoCal to manage its concession, relying on this the company make its own decisions on exploration, development, and production, over 86% of land in Saudi Arabia, including part of Iraq and Kuwait. In 1936 SoCal with its wholly-owned company California-Arabian Standard Oil Co. (CASOC) became a partner with Texas Oil Co. (TEXACO). Oil was found in Dammam well No.7 in Dhahran in 1938.⁴⁸ 1942-1944 the company constructed the Tapeline which aimed to ship oil to Europe through the Mediterranean. This early emphasis on mercantilism has had long standing ramification for our understanding the modern agenda of Saudi Aramco.

In 1944 the company changed its name from California-Arabian Standard Oil Co. (Casoc) to Arabian American Oil Co. (Aramco).⁴⁹ The competition for oil resources between western companies led Aramco to become involved in cultural policy to claim territory and define boundaries between Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. Aramco's early cultural involvement and research was derived from the dispute over boundaries with Oman and Qatar with their protector Great Britain (Buraimi crisis.)⁵⁰ Aramco wrote articles, made movies, and established their own magazine *Aramco World* 1949 to market their business and politics. Aramco by the time established its own government relations organization and hired Arabists to deal with Aramco issues.

In 1952 Saudi Aramco's employee protests over low wages and work conditions were violently put down as the feat that the riots would expand to threaten not only

⁴⁸ <http://www.saudiaramco.com>

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ Vitalis, p. 168.

Aramco, but the Saudi Royal family, keeping in mind the changes in neighboring countries, such as the coup against the King in Egypt and the nationalization of oil companies in Iran in 1952. 1964 brought cultural changes to Aramco as the threats of nationalism and unemployment grew. The fence of the Dhahran camp, the castle of “race and caste segregation”, was removed.⁵¹ However, early workers’ memories are vital in learning about Aramco’s slums. Aramco started its long term investment perspective by maximizing its Saudi national employees at all levels.⁵² This created a generation of local Aramco employees loyal to the company which in turn termed them “corporate citizens” (armacons). The Company was nationalized in 1980 following much political pressure from Arab countries during the 1960s and 70s, and the oil embargo in 1973.

Nationalization didn’t change the structure of the company, and its objectives were aligned with those of the government which sought to confirm its legitimacy through increasing national employment and prosperity, thus guaranteeing political stability. The company’s finances were overseen by the Supreme Council on Petroleum and Mineral Affairs (SCPMA) which is headed by the King himself and includes eight government ministers. This close relationship between the SCPMA, whose ministers mostly are products of Aramco, and the firm help to keep its financial and fiscal status in secrecy because the relevant data is not publicly available.

This corporate structure allows the company sufficient fiscal predictability to mobilize the capital and operating funds needed to fulfill its objectives. In certain cases involving very large investment projects, the company gets extra funding from the national budget overseen by the Ministry of Finance. When retained earnings are not sufficient, the company can enter

⁵¹ Vitalis, p.96; Al-Rasheed, p.92.

⁵² Vitalis, pp.152-168.

the international capital markets to borrow to supplement its access to capital.⁵³

This creates ambiguity in the spending on funds, sponsorship and charity projects on the national and international level which are not revealed by Saudi Aramco. In 1988 Saudi Arabian Oil Co. (Aramco) was established.

Today, the Saudi Arabia Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) is the officially state-owned oil and natural gas Company of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, based in Dhahran. It is “a fully integrated, global petroleum and chemicals enterprise” and the “world leader in hydrocarbons exploration, production, refining, distribution, shipping and marketing, and the world’s top exporter of crude oil and natural gas liquids (NGLs).”⁵⁴ Saudi Aramco has twenty subsidiaries around the world and serves the three major world markets - Asia, North America, and Europe. Saudi Aramco operates on both the national and international level, with 900 partner agreements in place in 2005 (with a projected target of 1,200 to transfer to a full e-commerce process).⁵⁵ Saudi Aramco has more than 20 subsidiaries and Training Services and Research labs around the globe. Their affiliates are located in Saudi Arabia, China, Egypt, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Over decades Aramco and Saudi Aramco has engaged in social, educational, research, environmental and cultural initiatives as part of its citizenship program. As part of its soft power strategy, it has partners in the UN, educational institutions, NGOs,

⁵³Stevens, p.194

⁵⁴ <http://www.saudiaramco.com> (2012).

⁵⁵Shoult, p. 431.

technology, aviation, environment, media, health, art, culture and others.⁵⁶ Saudi Aramco has carried on Aramco's tradition of developing the community through its training program, education opportunities, health and safety.

The corporate culture values, as stated on its website, “Excellence, Safety, Accountability, Integrity and Citizenship guide our business conduct and underpin all of our operations. Employees are expected to live by these values and promote them throughout the business.”⁵⁷ This dimension of Saudi Aramco culture is different from Saudi Arabia's extreme hierarchical and tightly controlled society. Combining both cultures within Saudi Aramco is a difficult challenge for its leadership, with the first originally generated by a large American multinational corporation, and the traditional Saudi ways. Saudi Aramco operates inside walls surrounding its compound, creating a state within a state and an ‘imagined community’⁵⁸ or “Gated Community”⁵⁹ with a corporate citizenship separated from the Saudi Society. “Over the past almost 80 years, Saudi Aramco has built extensive operational infrastructure and amassed a wealth of knowledge and capability. We plan to share this expertise as part of our corporate citizenship strategy.”⁶⁰

As Saudi Aramco partners grew globally, it was essential for Saudi Aramco to draw its own cultural diplomacy to foster its international relations and geopolitical agendas. Saudi Aramco’s blurred boundaries between private and national gave her more space to act. Cultural heritage would offer a future basis if given the right meaning. Thus,

⁵⁶ See Suratman.

⁵⁷ <http://www.saudiaramco.com>.

⁵⁸ Anderson, p.5.

⁵⁹ Barber, p. 231.

⁶⁰ <http://www.saudiaramco.com>

Saudi Aramco found cultural heritage to be a relaxed and attractive theme to advance its agenda, without fanfare and little public notice. Involvement in excavations, rehabilitation, research centers and exhibitions in national and international museums drove archeologists, anthropologists, historians, scientists, artists, lawyers, businessmen, policy studies analysts and diplomats to come together. In the next chapter I will define this policy according to how Luke and others see it as soft power policy as described by Joseph Nye in 2004. Although Saudi Aramco's records are hard to attain, the recent 2010 Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) between Saudi Aramco and the Saudi Commission of Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) reveals how Saudi Aramco is deeply involved in heritage-making and managing of the country and notes what is behind this involvement. For this I will take two case studies to unpack Saudi Aramco's agenda involvement in cultural heritage.

SAUDI ARAMCO'S CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT AND SOFT POWER

Interestingly, in the last decades Aramco has been involved in certain cultural policy projects, and using the lens provided by Luke and others described earlier, we can look at that cultural policy and analyze what kind of geo-political agendas are being advanced by that work. Cultural heritage in recent decades has become a catch phrase. It is increasingly receiving generous attention in both money and time form private and public sectors on preservation policy. This leads us to ask what is behind this increasing attention and if it is used as soft power for advancing certain geopolitical agendas.

Having covered the historical and corporate-cultural context of what Aramco is about, let us return to the problem I posed in the beginning of this paper to examine the intention of Aramco's usage of cultural heritage. Should we see heritage as a soft power?

How has cultural heritage been used politically? Has it in fact been this way? Is culture heritage's political usage a new idea in our time? In the following section I am going to look at Aramco's involvement in cultural policy and use some of its recent projects to illustrate how it is using culture as a tool for particular agendas.

Over the last sixty years Aramco has been involved in various cultural and educational sectors in varying degrees. Saudi Aramco has been engaged in social, educational, research, environmental and culture projects. For example, in 1949 it launched its own bimonthly educational magazine *Aramco World* in its headquarters in New York. Today the magazine had five international offices, and includes sub-magazines in Arabic to cover a wide variety of audiences. The magazine promotes cultural and historical narratives explicitly, but also implicitly a political-economic agenda. The company supported many health and safety programs such as building Saudi Aramco Medical Service Organization (SAMSO); back in 1940 it started its donation fund program. It sponsored a range of educational programs and scholarships sending Saudi students to study abroad⁶¹. In addition to building schools and higher education facilities and research centers within the Kingdom and abroad, it funded UNESCO, UNDP, Earth Watch, The Smithsonian Museums of Natural History, The Alexandria Library, the Middle East Policy Council, Arab World and Islamic Resources (AWAIR), Americans for Middle East Understanding (AMEU), The Meridian International Center of Washington DC, Middle East Institute and Arab American Institute, and Scholarship in Art and Archaeology, the School of Oriental and African Studies and many more.

⁶¹ *Aramco World*.1953. 2.

Most of these institutes aim to promote Arab and Saudi culture and political issues in the United States.⁶²

Saudi Aramco's early culture involvement and research was derived from the dispute over boundary with Oman and Qatar with their protector Great Britain (Buraimi Crisis).⁶³ They wrote articles, made movies, and established their own magazine *Aramco World* to market their business and politics. Aramco established its own government relation organization and hired Arabists to deal with Saudi-Aramco issues. The Exploration by members of geologists and geophysicists had a quite significance role in the company's archaeological discovery. Technology and Google helped Aramco in areal archaeology which led to many ancient and new discoveries. Aramco sponsored many art exhibitions, for example, "Gift of the Sultan: The Art of Giving at the Islamic Courts," held at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.⁶⁴

Saudi Aramco's archaeological and cultural involvement has a long history of excavation in the country. Due to its oil search many archaeological sites were revealed such as Thaj, Ayn Jamra, and Dhahran Burial Mounds, but the sites were also plundered. Aramco employees were engaged in these early archaeological excavations and research sponsored by Aramco archaeological research center. Although numbers are hard to come across because the close relations between Supreme Council on Petroleum and Mineral Affairs (SCPMA) and the firm help to keep its financial and fiscal status in secrecy and relevant data is not publicly available. The firm but ambiguous relation with

⁶² See Stern. Although information on donation is not revealed by Aramco, some of them can be tracked through the organizations themselves and the interrelation of many other organizations representing Aramco.

⁶³ Vitalis, p. 168.

⁶⁴ <http://www.saudiaramco.com> (2012).

the Saudi government and the United States makes it hard to trace financial data if it is not revealed by the Company itself.⁶⁵ The Company can use any of its subsidiaries or daughter companies to finance projects fostering its ideology without direct involvement.

However, the recent agreement of partnership with the Saudi Commission of Tourism and Antiquity (SCTA) gave full responsibility to Saudi Aramco to construct cultural heritage in the kingdom for the sake of sustainable development. Saudi Aramco has to sponsor, direct and manage cultural projects under the SCTA's cultural dimensions program—antiquity, museums, urban heritage sites, and handicrafts. Saudi Aramco responsibility is advancing this program of national cultural heritage which includes areas of protection, excavation, preservation and registration, scientific research, awareness and definition, site rehabilitation and development, museum, exhibitions, architectural heritage, and importantly rehabilitation of the historic routes and recovery of national relics. Saudi Aramco CEO Al-Fatih explained that this is not a new interest for Saudi Aramco, but rather “it stems first from its decades-old principles and national values, and also comes as an extension of its historical efforts in discovering many archaeological sites...along with supporting and funding archaeological excavation projects.”⁶⁶ This program gave Saudi Aramco a full access to the facilities and research center of SCTA as well as the use of commission-licensed tourist services. Cooperation with a local municipality is also stressed for the development.

Saudi Aramco with the cooperation with SCTA has to work on the preparation of certain sites to be included in cultural programs and nominate them to UNESCO world heritage for protection. To prepare archaeological sites certain steps should be taken:

⁶⁵ Shoult, p. 431.

⁶⁶ <http://www.saudiaramco.com>.

- establishment of a number of visitors' centers on archaeological and heritage sites
- Rehabilitation of a number of archaeological and heritage sites on the tourism tracks seventy site
- Sites 'museums (al Raka in AlJhobar and Mardoma and Al Defi in Al Jubail)
- Rehabilitation of the historic road routes (7 projects)

Rehabilitation of World Heritage Sites; Madain Saleh, Dir'yyah, Jeddah historical area, Dumat Al Jondal, Magaer Shoaib (Shoaib Caves), Jebra rock inscriptions sites, Al Showaimis in Hail, rock inscriptions sites in Hama well at Najran Province. Also, urban heritage projects included: Al Dhat Heritage Town, Al Ula Heritage Town, Rjal Al 'a Heritage Village, Jubail Heritage Village, Al Oznib Heritage Village, Al Khobar Heritage Town. Additionally, rehabilitation of old Souks: Dahran Al Janouh Souk, Eael Asir Souk, Al Khohba Souk, Hail Souk, Al Makhwa Souk, Al-Nairia Souk, Al Goz Souk. Moreover, Historic city projects included Riyadh City Center, Al Hafouf City Center, Al Taif City Center, Najran City Center, Te'a City Center, Tabuk City Center, and Abha City Center. Lastly rehabilitation projects of the architectural heritage of Red Sea historical ports: Yanbu Historic Seaport, Alaj Historic Seaport, Al Wajh Historic Seaport, and Shaba Historic Seaport.⁶⁷

While SCTA insists that the aim behind the program is to promote sustainable human development by attracting tourism as part of UNESCO's culture heritage program, a closer look reveals that these projects are used as soft power for advancing certain political agendas as Luke suggested, following Joseph S. Nye's argument, "the

⁶⁷ SCTA

ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion.”⁶⁸ In February 2011, as part of the Arab uprising, demonstrations took place in Jeddah and other cities in the Kingdom. Although they were dimmed very quickly, King Abdulla was alerted. Packages of social welfare reforms in the amount of \$36, and \$97 million, respectively were released for housing, education, and jobs creation, but the biggest amount, \$67 million, was paid for the military and religious groups who helped silencing the demonstrations. That was meant to buy time for the government to shuffle its papers; and sought to foster national awareness.⁶⁹ Saudi Aramco’s involvement in this program is very obvious since the government used its bonds as a proxy for payment. As mentioned earlier, despite Saudi Aramco’s nationalization, it kept its special status as a private corporation. Saudi Aramco’s concern is that its position will be affected if some of the 43% jobless people could turn to radical Islam as a result, which will concern both the corporate sectors and the United States.⁷⁰

New jobs needed accelerated programs and understanding of new ideology which can be implemented in the frame work of attractive and new cultural heritage narratives. This can be done by inventing educational programs that enhance the society in a designed framework, including areas such as art, music, science, technology, and archaeology. Saudi Aramco’s ideology and belief is that they “can make difference wherever [they] do business by investing in innovation and entrepreneurship, creating educational opportunities, powering economic partnership for energy sustainability.”⁷¹ The company has to work on the new generation to shift it from radicalism. The new

⁶⁸ Nye, p. x,

⁶⁹ See Abu-Naser and Fattah. Also see *The Guardian*. 2011.

⁷⁰ Central Department of Statistics & Information

⁷¹ <http://www.saudiaramco.com>

generation has to be directed into science, innovation, social activities, and culture. They have to build in them the feeling of belonging and pride of where they come from and at the same time engage them with the outside world through art, culture exchange and cooperation, sponsorship and scholarship.⁷²

Assigning cultural heritage programs to Saudi Aramco blurred its boundaries between the state and the company. Saudi government will avoid the radical conservatives' critics by doing so. Since the company has its own culture within Saudi Arabia it can promote and advance the project more freely. The company has succeeded in combining the Saudi culture with its own original culture, generated by a large American multinational corporation. With this culture it will help the Saudis to cross to multiculturalism without losing national pride. The people could accept the enlightened projects from Saudi Aramco not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in the United States. Both people still think about the corporation as an American one, even after nationalization. This may be coming from the special behavior of Saudi Aramco and its special relationship with the American administration office and its power to make decisions on foreign policy.

Saudi Aramco's cultural heritage program can be seen as part of reconciliation, U.S. and Saudi Arabia integration and economic and geographic expansion. These advancing agendas of cultural heritage show the ability of cultural heritage of changing the geopolitical power in a larger context. Here heritage programs are proposing an attractive platform in shaping identities surpassing states' national boundaries.⁷³ To illustrate these agendas, I will discuss two projects of Saudi Aramco's direct

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ See Nye; Luke.

involvement: King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and “*Road of Arabia*” exhibition. These projects are intended to be apolitical and enhance the softer image of Saudi Arabia, on national and international arena, and aim to integrate Saudi Arabia on the national and international arena and aim to integrate Saudi Arabia as a liberal modern kingdom with long, rich heritage. However, reading between the lines will show that the projects are a powerful power to advance economic and geopolitical agendas.

King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture

Saudi Aramco is establishing the King Abdul-Aziz Center for World Culture (KACWC) to promote learning, creativity and inspiration in Saudi Arabia. The center will be open in 2015, and it will contain a public library, a world class museum, a life learning center, youth enrichment and innovation programs, a wide variety of visiting and permanent programs, live events and multimedia sites. The center will “explore and celebrate Arab heritage, while bringing world cultures to the kingdom.”⁷⁴ The cultural center’s archive will include rare culture and historical documents, books, images and film footage especially on the history of the Saudi Arabian Oil Company. The center runs many activities, such as the Ithra knowledge program, Children’s Art Contest, and contemporary art exhibits brought by Franc’s Centre Pompidou. The Ithra program is supported by Saudi Aramco partners EP Traffic Safety Council, Pompidou Center, Grande exhibitions, ling’alha khadra (let’s make green), 101 inventions, and Saudi Energy Efficiency Center. King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture “will help Saudis connect their own culture to that of others around the world, serving as a catalyst for

⁷⁴ King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture

creativity and innovation.”⁷⁵ The center is designed to become an inspiration of knowledge, creativity and cross-cultural engagement in the Kingdom. The goal of building the center is “Building Knowledge Societies for Sustainable Human Development”⁷⁶. The KACWC is in partnership with UNESCO and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST).

KACWC reveals Saudi Aramco’s philosophy about cultural heritage as a sustainable development of modern culture. By using specific aspects of the past that are integrated into an officially sanctioned view of the national heritage, it narrates the future of the Company as well as the Kingdom. As part of this initiative the center sponsored the celebration of World Heritage Day in the Kingdom. In its key note speech it addressed “the rich possibilities that can result from the exchange of cultural experiences across borders and people. The center’s heritage message was not about the past so much as about the future, and the new generation to come.”⁷⁷ To achieve this message the majority has to be guided indirectly through attractions, knowledge and a sense of dignity as a universal approach. This reminds us in Said’s Orientalism. But Saudi Aramco officially is a national company that takes a paternal role for the sake of national pride and saving cultural richness. This can be seen in the words of director Fuad F. al-Therman on the occasion of the opening of the Creativity Forum in the center in the presence of the best artists, architects, engineers and designers in the world (Western world). There he tried to redirect the audience from thinking about the Saudi Arabia not just as a “tap-oil”, but also a land rich in culture and history by saying, “Saudi Arabia is

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ *ibid* “World Heritage Day.”

living off the wealth of its rich land. A land rich in natural resources for sure, but some would say even richer in heritage, history and culture.”⁷⁸ In doing so, he is reaching two audiences, first, he makes the Saudis feel good about themselves and about their national pride, homogenizing their diversities in playing on a national string to produce a Saudi national tune. At the same time he is creating broader context in addressing the international audience about the importance of the Saudi Arabian history and heritage going back in time and space to produce a future understanding for further integration of the Saudi people as civilized moderate society, separated from radicals. Here, the Islamic civilization of the Saudis are reposted as a collective modern idea similar to society and culture in the west, in indirectly distancing themselves from the terrorist groups that are trying to impose their ideology on the others.

To foster these ideas the culture center is using semiotic narration. “Capturing the Energy and Spirit of Saudi Culture and Social Heritage” was the title of an art installation at KACWC. The competition for the art monument “has been organized by Saudi Aramco’s Art Selection Committee, comprised of Saudi Aramco representatives and leading Saudi and international art experts, including the Director of MOMA San Francisco and the Director of the Serpentine Gallery in London, and is being run in collaboration with the Public Art Fund of New York.”⁷⁹ The center uses these activities to appreciate and celebrate diversity, and to engage in community and learning.⁸⁰ Civil society has to be taught since Saudi Arabia lacks civil society institutions. Cosmopolitanism is presented here by making art from the culture of the past with

⁷⁸ Ibid. 2013.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

multinational participants. While Aramco is advancing both cosmopolitanism and nationalism on its agenda—I will call it “Cosmo-natio-politism” –which is reflecting its own culture. National identity is essential to unite the diverse society of Saudi Arabia.

A national notion is implied in the efforts of the Culture Center archaeological department trying to repatriate national relics from foreign collectors. To foster a national idea, people has to learn to identify themselves with their cultural heritage which could be seen as sharing the same past documented in archaeological relics. Therefore, KACWC called for the repatriation of Saudi artifacts from foreign collections to be studied and used at the center and, within the Kingdom, for educational resources and experiences for visitors of all ages, abilities and pursuits.⁸¹ Saudi Aramco signed an agreement with SCTA to repatriate Saudi antiquity artifacts that were collected by its employees through the time that they working in the kingdom. Saudi Aramco argued that the objects were removed by “Aramcons” and their dependents often motivated by a desire to preserve them for posterity. Saudi Aramco, in an initiative for the repatriation of those objects offered rewards and certificates of appreciation and for the donors to “be named, with the artifacts donated, on a plaque displayed at the Centre.”⁸² In doing so, Saudi Aramco is addressing the burst of nationalism against foreign investors and foreign employees by letting them feel good about themselves as heroes of a civil society that cares about others and tries to help them. At the same time it makes itself looking good in the eyes of Saudi nationals. The call for repatriation of national relics engages two states in a kind of confrontation, but Saudi Aramco is playing a mediator for reconciliation between people from both countries, replacing the state’s role in both Saudi Arabia and

⁸¹ <http://www.saudiaramco.com> (2012).

⁸² *ibid*

the United States. Here national relics are used as a soft power in culture diplomacy exceeding the state boundaries to widen the corporation boundaries in space and time on the global arena as mode of self-identity. Also Saudi Aramco is focusing on the repatriation of pre-Islamic relics to show its non-denominational character and to foster this idea in Saudi society and abroad thus enhancing the image of the Saudis, as having descended from a great civilization.

Here the SCTA is dealing with Saudi Aramco as a Private Corporation and holds it responsible for the removal of archeological artifacts from its territory. Saudi Aramco's cooperation is intended for reconciliation and to improve its image and foster it for the corporation's sustainable social development. Also differentiating itself from government institutions, Mae Mozaini, Director of Public Affairs at Aramco Services Company in Houston, said that "the types of Artifacts sought are not related to Aramco, but rather they are objects of national historical interest, with an emphasis on pre-Islamic archeological objects."⁸³ Aramco "gated community" separated itself from Saudi society. Aramco in the 1930s and 1940s looked at its local employees through the lens of Orientalism. The worker demonstrations were suppressed to diminish the Arab-nationalism, they were deprived from their rights and their quality of life was very bad. Class division occurred between rich and poor because oil was not included in the national heritage, and therefore not a part of national pride. Aramco, with agreement with the Saudi royals, limited education and union organization for workers to minimize risk of danger, especially with the rise of Arab nationalism. At the same time it employed the methods of the "Salvation

⁸³ibid

Army”⁸⁴ to enlighten the society and share its human principles with them. But what Aramco provided was limited to its Aramcons, which differentiated themselves from their origins and cultural heritage. Saudi Aramco has to reengage them in their communities and teach them how to appreciate their heritage.

The above ideas are revealed by using intangible cultural heritage narratives. The article “Feature: A Trip Back in Time”, in Saudi Aramco World, concentrates on looking at the past as a kind of reconciliation connecting the Saudis with their past traditions as a harmony for future’s success, downplaying Islamization and strengthening the national unity and acceptance of the outside world as a partner rather than as an (culturally alien) invader. “The team approached the expedition, not with the intention of conquering the desert but with the intention of passing gently through, knowing that success would come only by living in harmony with nature.”⁸⁵ The article describes a desert camel trip of a team of Saudi Aramco employees funded and organized by Saudi Aramco. The article uses the trust between the rider and the camel as a metaphor for the Saudis and Saudi Aramco, and expands the company’s space by merging it with the Bedouin space, “The route of the trip would pass by wells dug deep into the desert, some by Saudi Aramco and others by the Bedouin themselves.” Trying to globalize this idea, the article ends by referring to Saudi Aramco employee Fahad Al-Daajani whose family originally comes from that area in the desert, as “reflecting on his desert experience in a presentation to a delegation from Harvard University that was visiting Saudi Arabia.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Citino, p.45-46.

⁸⁵ Saudi Aramco World, “Feature: A Trip Back in Time.”

⁸⁶ *ibid*

By promoting national and international tourism through cultural heritage and culture exchange programs, Saudi Aramco succeeded in attracting national tourism through its festivals, programs, and promotions for art exhibitions and future technology. It regularly provides the number of visitors and participants in these programs and festivals on its website. For example CEO al-Falih said that in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture Ithra Youth program is intended to reach ten million Saudis by 2020. The program attracted 300,000 Saudis this year. Saudi Aramco not only concentrates on Saudi visitors but is seeking to draw more international visitors to the Kingdom. In doing so, Saudi Aramco is promoting the archeological discoveries it has made or come across during its long presence in the kingdom. These were brought together in the “Roads of Arabia” exhibition which was organized in collaboration with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities.

Roads of Arabia

Ancient Arabia was marked by trade routes which flourished along the way between Yemen, Syria, the Persian Gulf and Africa. The oases offered a refuge for long journey travelers and traders who brought their goods and culture along with them. The exhibition *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, as its title indicates, is reconstructing those routes to show the importance of the region. “Roads of Arabia” is an exhibition of Saudi Arabian artifacts that is touring many museums in Europe and the United States. The exhibition’s well-chosen artifacts construct the history of the Arabian Peninsula from ancient civilizations to the modern era, concentrating on ancient trade, pilgrims and migration routes between east, west and Africa. The exhibition is often described as magnificent, unique and one of the best

exhibitions, attracting more than two million visitors. Its name derived from the millennia-old mercantile and pilgrim routes that brought prosperity to Arabia before and after Islam. Relics from Mecca and Medina, the two holy cities, are shown for the first time. “Roads of Arabia” is the first Saudi exhibition that toured the Louvre, Paris; La Caixa Foundation in Barcelona; the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg; the Pergamum Museum in Berlin; Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C.; Carnegie Museum in Pennsylvania; and is currently displayed in the Museum of Fine Art in Houston before moving on to The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO; Asian Art Museum in San Francisco through early 2015.⁸⁷ The exhibition was possible in the frame work of joint exhibition projects with the collaboration between SCTA, Saudi Aramco, the Louvre, Museum für Islamische Kunst Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Smithsonian, the 14 international archaeological teams from the US, Germany, France, the UK, Italy and Australia⁸⁸, and with, archeological institutes, oriental institutes, diplomats, academics, scientists, artists, corporations and many others, under the patronage of the states’ high officials. The exhibit drew enormous support from states’ own finances and private corporations, cultural institutes, along with Banks and foreign offices to various degrees, such as Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin, Banaja Holding, Saudi Binladen Group, Saudi Ministry of foreign Affairs; Silver-Partners are: Khaled Huffali Co., Tamer, S Automotive (Samaco), Haki Huesin Allreza & Co. Ltd.; and Bronze-partners are: Siemens, Deutshce Bank, Total, Vivantes, EADS, Ghorfa Arab German Chamber of Commerce and Industry e.v., Diehl Metering, Annemarie Borlind natural beauty, DAFG;

⁸⁷ SCTA.

⁸⁸ Covington.

Mobility-Partner, DB BAHN and Zitty Berlin.⁸⁹ It is noteworthy to mention that most of these companies are subsidiaries or strong partners with Saudi Aramco. Moreover, in the U.S., the exhibition is organized by the Arthur Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with SCTA, Saudi Aramco and the Louvre, and was sponsored by Saudi Aramco, ExxonMobil, The Olayan Group, Fluor, Boeing, Alturki, SABIC, and Saudi Arabian Airlines.⁹⁰ The exhibition focused on all three dimensions of heritage making, material, behavioral, and conceptual, to facilitate the understanding of cultural importance as well as to preserve it.⁹¹ Despite the idea of the exhibition being to promote awareness about the kingdom and tourism, the statements made by many officials during the exhibition tended to foster the position of Saudi Arabia-Aramco-state department's political agenda by promoting and accepting Saudi Arabia as an important player on international arena, and the center of economic growth in the world.

What makes "Roads of Arabia" so important is not only the artifacts it exhibits but the way in which this project exploits Saudi Arabia's past to promote both the kingdom and Saudi Aramco's interests and their political and economic agendas. It has to be mentioned that exploitation of archaeology for political purposes, and occasionally even outright grandstanding, has its own tradition, notably in countries like Iran prior to the 1979 revolution (e.g., the festivities in Persepolis on the occasion of the 2500 year anniversary of the Iranian monarchy) or Israel (the connotations developed in the wake of Yigael Yadin's excavation of the Masada fortress). "Roads of Arabia" can be seen as this kind of project.

⁸⁹ See Roads of Arabia.

⁹⁰ MFAH

⁹¹ Dilva and Chapagain editors, p.348.

“Roads of Arabia” is reconstructing the past for the development of future schemes. In its comment on “Roads of Arabia”, SCTA connected the past of the Kingdom with the present and expanded its cultural dimension throughout time and space. “The idea [is to shed] light on the historic position of the Kingdom, acquainting the world with its cultural dimension, highlighting the particular importance of the antiquities of Saudi Arabia, to understand the chain of human history and the current progress witnessed in the Kingdom under the wise leadership, [in] addition to bringing out the leading role played by Saudi Arabia in human communication”.⁹² The importance of the exhibition comes “as an extension the kingdom’s international presence and its eminent position in Islam....[and] due to the Kingdom’s unique geographical location, which makes it the major economic and culture hub, as well as a communication bridge between the West and the East.”⁹³ However, the West during the 19th and 20th centuries framed Arabia through the romantic western cultural lens of Orientalism. The exhibition is intended to change this image, as most of the participants revealed.

Correcting the image of the country is thus one of the exhibition’s prime objectives. The related narrative must be contextualized for specific needs arising within that context. Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, president of SCTA, interviewed by CNN in Paris, insisted on the Kingdom’s civilization before Islam, he said: “...so you need to be coming from somewhere. We don’t just come from deep oil wells or we don’t just come from a big economy or from the most cherished position as the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques and the Land of Islam.” He added, in order to justify his claim, “[w]hen Islam came to Arabia especially to Mecca... it didn’t come to an empty wild

⁹² SCTA

⁹³ibid

land or a void, it didn't come on a blank sheet of paper. It came on the shoulders of a great civilization." Arabia was earlier depicted like many Arab countries, i.e. as oriental, exotic, with camels and desert, Mr.al-Ghabban vice president of SCTA argues "Most Westerners believe that Saudi Arabia is only a desert land with oil wells," and "They don't know that the country was a bridge between the East and the West. We played this role in the fourth millennium BCE, and we continue to play it."⁹⁴ Al-Ghabban argued that people needed to be educated about cultural heritage to change these ideas.

The construction of national heritage needs scholarly literature. The interchange between anthropologist, scientists, historians, economists, artists, diplomats, and practitioners to rewrite history is a political process. Conferences, meetings, and seminars took place during the preparation for the exhibition that brought those participants together. Through this new globalized culture-making evolved which will facilitate new social relations and therefore cultural diplomacy. This created a sustained cooperation which is highly valued in long-term development across national frontiers and cultural boundaries. As part of this cooperation, the exhibition's objects were loaned by Saudi Arabia, the Louver, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris, Bilbilotheéque Natioanle in Paris, National Museums in Berlin, the Tubingen Library, Berlin state library, and London's Royal Geographical Society which loaned maps of early 20th century Ottoman railways, and many private lenders.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ See Covington.

⁹⁵ Bauer, "The Kula of Long-Term Loans: Culture Object Itineraries and the Promise of the Postcolonial 'Universal' Museum," argues that the itineraries of objects create entanglements, and therefore generate new culture he calls, "postcolonial and globally-engaged culture."

Attractive objects have the power to draw attention and therefore more participants and viewers. The objects of Ka'bah are an attractive force, drawing more than two million to see them.⁹⁶ Aaron Wiener wrote in Spiegel online international under the title 'Mecca Turns West: Roads of Arabia Run through Berlin' "It is a premiere for Germany. Never before have artifacts from Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba in Mecca, been on display in the country."⁹⁷ SCTA see it as educational and part of world heritage, "Our antiquities are a part of the world's heritage as well as an essential part of Saudi Arabia's national cultural identity."⁹⁸ They are also "providing a balancing effect stemming from [their] religious and economic character, and manifesting itself in such undertakings as King Abdullah's Dialog of Civilizations initiative."⁹⁹

Dialogue needs knowledge. AL Ghabban argues that people should be educated about the new history of the kingdom, using archaeology. This is an enlightening project. "In the outside world, we should correct the wrong image of our country. And within Saudi Arabia, too, we need to educate people about their heritage. We would like to show everyone—both foreigners and Saudis—how we have participated in the history of humanity, not only in the Islamic period, but even before Islam."¹⁰⁰ Emphasizing changing the image of Saudi Arabia, the exhibition is using black and white panoramic wall-size photography to show the diversity of the Arabian geography. Beatrice Andre-Salivini, co-curator of the exhibition, said "Before each section, we want visitors to

⁹⁶ See Bauer's concept of "attractive force."

⁹⁷ See Wiener.

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ SCTA. "Saudi Arabia's Heritage Dimension."

¹⁰⁰ See Covington.

understand that people live in oases and mountainous regions, and that there were important urban centers.”¹⁰¹

Urban centers show civilized society which is a result of economic prosperity. To highlight the importance of the economic position of the Kingdom and its future development, the exhibition is used to incorporate certain places into sanctioned views of the national heritage while dismissing others “as a threat to the national imaginary and are suppressed or obliterated.”¹⁰² The reporter of CNN said “It is a tale of Arabia across routes of ancient civilizations, Egypt and Rome to the West, India and China to the East”¹⁰³ “Roads of Arabia” examines the impact of ancient trade routes traversing the peninsula to Mesopotamia and the Greco-Roman World.

The power of politics reflects in the strategy of choosing relics to reflect specific purposes. “The carefully-selected relics of [the] exhibition reflect the effective contribution of man in this land over the centuries in the making of the human history.”¹⁰⁴ The relics demonstrate the role of “Arabia” “in the international economy, as well as its impact on different cultures when taking into account the geographic location of the Arabian Peninsula, which was a center of peaceful, cultural and economic relations between the [E]ast and the [W]est as well as a communication bridge between civilizations.”¹⁰⁵ Prince Sultan confirmed this idea by arguing that “[e]xcavations have proved the progress achieved by the Kingdom’s historical cities such as Mecca, Medina,

¹⁰¹ibid

¹⁰²Meskell p.155.

¹⁰³SCTA

¹⁰⁴Global Travel Industry News, <http://networkedblogs.com/hTGYj>.

¹⁰⁵ibid

Taima, Al-Ula and Najran. The historic Souk Okaz in Taif not only promoted trade but also cultural activities.”¹⁰⁶

“Roads of Arabia” cultural activities went beyond culture politics to foster foreign relations. “Roads of Arabia” is “an important project regarding foreign affairs as well as cultural-political level.”¹⁰⁷ The opening ceremonies were marked with high diplomatic speeches and the insistence on the importance of bilateral relations. Prince Sultan in his opening words in the Louvre said that “[i]t is merely the concretization of the special relationships established between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the French Republic”. It is noteworthy here that the exhibition in the Louvre was the fruit of an agreement with the French government on cultural collaboration signed by President Jacques Chirac and King Abdullah in the spring of 2006. The result also was a joint venture of Saudi Aramco and French Total in Satrap 2008 under one refinery “one plant, one team” world-class refinery.¹⁰⁸

Economic agreement follows or goes together cultural agreement, it often accompanied by high diplomatic representation. Aramco and Total joint venture came after cultural cooperation between France and Saudi Arabia in 2006 when Riyadh hosted a sample of Islamic artifacts from the Louvre on the occasion of the visit of President Jacques Chirac to Saudi Arabia. Like the case in France, the exhibition in Berlin was opened by Prince Sultan and Mayor Klaus Wowereit, in the presence of high diplomatic and corporation officials. Where many of the artifacts in Pergamum museum are under the demand of repatriation, Saudi Arabia did not demand its artifacts from the state

¹⁰⁶ Saudi-U.S. Relations Information Service

¹⁰⁷ See Roads of Arabia.

¹⁰⁸ Total. Article; Satorp.

museum and other oriental institutes in Germany; this can be seen as a compromise for a political scheme and economic cooperation. The exhibition was the fruit of collaboration after Wowereit visited Saudi Arabia in 2010, heading a business and cultural delegation that included Michael Eisenhauer, General Director of Berlin's State Museums, and Stefan Weber, the Director of the Museum for Islamic Art and host of the exhibition. Weber's positive propaganda for the Saudis managed to gain funds from the Berlin city lottery, and DBahn. However, these were soon paid off; the positive propaganda for the Saudi regime ended with Siemens almost one billion dollars agreement with Saudi Aramco in 2013.¹⁰⁹ The President of the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz mentioned that the exhibition is a good contribution to German cultural foreign policy from the Foundation. This could explain the agreement of the German government on US foreign Policy regarding the Middle East area. Patrick Henningsen wrote in his article "Saudi Arabia's Real Agenda for Syria" that, "Bush family business partner and terror financier Prince Bander Bin Sultanrevealed the underlying transnational energy agenda being played by the US, its allies in Europe, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar,"¹¹⁰

The most important partner for the Saudis is the United States and vice versa. The exhibition in the United States was sponsored by Saudi Armco and its subsidiaries with the collaboration with Smithsonian which opened its first step in Sackler Gallery in Washington DC. Barbara Ferguson in her article "Roads of Arabia: Treasures from Saudi Arabia's Ancient and More Recent Past" commented on the opening ceremony, "[w]hat is poignant is that they all share the same link: crossroads." The opening in Washington drew many high-level diplomats. The opening and ribbon-cutting was represented by

¹⁰⁹ Siemens; Siemens Saudi Arabia.

¹¹⁰ Henningsen. Article

“James B. Smith, American ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States; Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, President and Chairman, [SCTA]; Prince Turki Al Faisal; Dr. G. Wayne Clough, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; and Dr. Julian Raby, The Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Free Gallery of Art.”¹¹¹ Six persons for cutting the ribbon is a significant sign for a big partnership like a corporation deal. Prince Sultan, in his opening speech at the Houston museum, in the presence of former Secretary of State, James Baker, said that “Saudi Arabia wants to maintain strong relations with the United States. ‘King Abdul Aziz, the founder, had told then US President Franklin Roosevelt that he wanted to strengthen US relations because it upholds its unchangeable values.’”¹¹² He highlighted the long cooperation and growing Saudi-US ties, saying that thousands of Saudi students are pursuing their higher studies at American universities and institutes. He also “highlighted the significant role played by Islam in bolstering security and stability in Arabia.” And he added that “Saudi Arabia is a stable country and is making a steady progress”¹¹³ under the King Abdullah. However, he didn’t explain how Islam bolster security in Arabia with the rise of Islamist terror groups in the area and how Saudi Arabia remains stable in the wave of uprisings in the neighboring Arab countries. One is sure not about its democracy. Many ask if the exhibition is intended to reconcile Saudi relations with the West after 9/11, enhancing its image through using pre-Islamic artifacts and showing signs from al-Ka’ba. When Mr. al-Ghabban was asked about what the Wahhabi will think about the exhibition, the journalist

¹¹¹ Ferguson. Article.

¹¹² Saudi-US Relations Information Service.

¹¹³ *ibid*

told him, “[f]or some extreme Islamist, pagan antiquities are sinful. Before the Washington exhibit opened, an Egyptian fundamentalist threatened to destroy pre-Islamic monuments, like the ancient Sphinx and the Pyramids, if he’s able to.” Al-Ghabban replied with a refusal of the idea, “It’s stupidity, I think. The first Muslims did not do the same.” He added “... I can guarantee you there is no contradiction between protecting the human heritage and Islam.”¹¹⁴ These routes are far-reaching in the argument of cultural diversity and accepting the Other, even without direct indication of Christians and Jews, which was not mentioned in any of the articles.

However, the representation of Islam in one entity revealed the Saudi Arabian agenda in implementing one kind of Islam while eliminating its opponents. This policy is working very well with the development and modernization policy of Saudi Aramco which seems to eradicate certain monuments for political aims. For example, the destruction of cultural heritage in Mecca and Medina reveals how cultural heritage is selected and calculated to achieve certain political and economic agendas rather than to preserve cultural heritage. As the cradle of Islam, and the focal point of Muslims during the Hajj, some argue, that Mecca should be the most protected heritage in the kingdom. Despite the title of the King in Saudi Arabia referring to the “custodian of the two holy Mosques” and the protector of Islam, the holy city of Mecca was going through a total destruction of cultural heritage. Although the importance of Mecca and Medina should be placed under the UNESCO World Heritage program, some say that for political reasons this didn’t happen. The three sites they promoted or have allowed to be designated under the UNESCO World Heritage do not represent Islam. On the contrary they promoted the

¹¹⁴ See Elmasry.

site of At-Turif District in ad-Dir'iyah where the Saud family themselves came from and increased their rule by combining themselves with Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab who founded the ideology of the Wahhabi.¹¹⁵ The destruction of the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad and the tombs of many other important Islamic figures in cemeteries is very well known. The Saudi cultural heritage that came under the World Heritage rubric is very poor in quantity for a country claiming such a great civilization. These monuments were claimed to block the modernization space of the city that needs to contain the millions of Hajj visitors who are increasing in numbers each year.

Modernization rhetoric is used by Saudi Aramco as a tool to select some cultural heritage and eliminate others to expand its investments in new constructions and present the country as a modern state that fits the Saudi agenda. For example, Saudi Arabia was accused of “cultural massacre” for demolishing the Ottoman fort in Mecca.¹¹⁶ However, the fort represented a colonized period in Saudi Arabian history and the economic claim that the Ottomans benefited as they claimed to be the custodian of the holy cities. The destruction of other non-Wahhabi monuments in Mecca and Medina under modernization and preservation was highlighted in many articles. Reuters’s article “Mecca for the rich: Islam’s holiest site ‘turning into Vegas’” explains how Al-Saud are destroying the Islamic heritage of Mecca and Medina in the name of modernization, and rehabilitation of the city “[t]o the al-Saud monarchy, Mecca is their vision of the future—a steel and concrete metropolis built on the proceeds of enormous oil wealth that showcases their national pride,” and the city of Mecca where “all Muslims would be equal, has become a playground for the rich, critics say, where naked capitalism has usurped spirituality as the

¹¹⁵ WHC.UNESCO

¹¹⁶ See TCF.

city's raison d'être."¹¹⁷ Now Mecca inhabitants refer bitterly to their city as Las Vegas, with skyscrapers, luxury hotels and shopping malls spreading, as mentioned the article. The article goes on to note that inhabitants of the city are losing their houses and properties and their archaeological heritage in the name of modernization backed by Wahhabi clerics, (as mentioned earlier, religious clerics were slaves for their owner and their preaching has to serve his political agenda.) The international community is silent because of their fear either to lose diplomatic ties and pilgrimage visas, or business agreements. While western archeologists fear losing access (or something else), Saudi archaeologists and historian started to speak up. Dr. Irfan al-Alawi executive director of the Islamic Heritage Research Foundation said: "No one has the balls to stand up and condemn this cultural vandalism,"¹¹⁸ citing the article and referring to many sites that are at risk.¹¹⁹ One day, there will be a new narrative and new added layers of complexity to the holy cities after those monuments are gone.

DISCUSSION

In promoting specific objects and history, Saudi Aramco's cultural heritage programs and preservation show the contradiction and exploitation of heritage for political purpose. By utilizing Saudi cultural heritage as powerful but barely perceptible, Saudi Aramco was able to market its geopolitical agenda without anyone noticing. The culture programs are selected to fit the company's politics and public relations. Saudi Aramco's involvement in cultural heritage can be seen as part of its soft power agenda to enhance international relations and foster stability and economic sustainability.

¹¹⁷ See Taylor.

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

Conferences and cultural exchange programs are used as tools for enhancing international relations for greater outreach in the global arena. Saudi Aramco's objectives are aligned with those of the government which sought to confirm its legitimacy through increasing national employment and prosperity, and thus to guarantee political stability. Cultural heritage here is used to redefine the history of Saudi Arabia, its economic and religious importance in the world, to keep peace and oil sustainability, and to advance its political power in the region. Now let us confront this initiative by critiquing this normative concept of cultural heritage as a soft power and see what the destructive consequences that could emerge from their bad intentions.¹²⁰ We should be aware that the use of cultural heritage could be seen as using a "double edged sword" doing harm as well as protecting. During the exhibition of "Roads of Arabia" in Berlin, criticisms and ironic comments about dealing with the authoritative regime of Saudi Arabia were brought up but they were muted. Berlin and Paris are US allies and Saudi Aramco is their oil provider whose stability depends on the stability of the Saudi government. Therefore Paris and Berlin turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's violations domestically and regionally despite, the domestic critics they faced.

Great civilization contradicts the bitter closed, strict, authoritative societal reality in Saudi Arabia. Human rights violations and suppression is well known in the kingdom under the rhetoric of religion and Islamic culture. Their new "terrorism law" accused atheists, or anyone who questions the fundamentals of the Islamic religion as terrorists. Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director of Human Rights Watch (HRW), said: "These regulations dash any hope that King Abdullah intends to open a

¹²⁰ Nye, p. xiii.

space for peaceful dissent or independent groups.”¹²¹ Instead it gave the state more grips on oppositions argued HRW. The death penalty, even including non-nationals, has been rising in recent years in Saudi Arabia as revealed in the yearly report of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights on Saudi Arabia. The recent interference in Bahrain to cut the flow of the uprising is an international violation. However the interest in Bahrain comes to stabilize oil industry which belongs to Aramco.

The use of Wahhabi culture, crossing the Saudi boundary to global arena, is financed from Saudi money and, here the boundary between Saudi government and Saudi Aramco for the interest of their geopolitical agenda is diluted. Some argue that the Saudi government is pushing Wahhabi ideology, paid by Saudi Aramco-dollars, for their expansion geographically in abroad.¹²² Wahhabism ideology and politic does not accept any other ideologies, this will put it in confrontation with the others. Here security, which is essential for sustainable stability and prosperity, could be affected.

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage has become a very common discourse in recent decades in international arena of government and nongovernmental organizations. The preservation and restoration of some chosen projects became a method for global battle cry to protect world heritage of outstanding value. Heritage can be seen here as tool from the past that is accompanying the present to produce the future of “human condition and politics”.¹¹¹ Saudi Aramco’s involvement in cultural heritage-making can be seen as part of its soft power initiatives. Saudi Aramco’s soft power can be classified by international involvement in the U.N. (A.I.D., UNESCO, Health and Environment), social welfare,

¹²¹ HRW

¹²² See Evans-Pritchard.

exchange programs, participation in multilateral institutions, high diplomacy and cultural heritage. The involvement of Saudi Aramco in cultural heritage is intended to advance certain geopolitical agendas in global arena. Saudi Aramco's special position in the United States and Saudi Arabia gave it power to make its own cultural diplomacy that could serve its agendas and those of Saudi Arabia and the United States, as long as they have the same policy. Saudi Aramco's cultural heritage program can be seen to advance international relation by reconciliation, U.S. and Saudi Arabia integration and global economic and geographic expansion. These agendas were explored, discussing two important examples of the direct involvement of Saudi Aramco: King Abdulaziz Cultural Center program and Roads of Arabia.

King Abdulaziz Culture Center program is intended to foster national spirit, reconciliation, and world integration while downplaying Islam. By using cultural heritage with knowledge and science, history will be reconstructed to shape the future. Saudis should be taught and made aware of their national history which all of them share. This should encourage a national unity and reduce differences between citizens so that they acquire a new national identity with the state rather than primarily with Islam which is not one entity anymore. The repatriation of the objects from Aramcons is intended to reconcile (Saudis and Americans) rather than to arouse conflict. The international participants in heritage-making in the center will integrate the Saudis as well as the Saudi state on global arena and represent them as civilized and modern, in opposition to the idea of the strict Islam that produced the terrorists of 9/11.

Likewise, "Roads of Arabia" reassures Saudi Aramco's agendas on an international level. The concentration on international relations and economic expansion

is well highlighted in the exhibition. Its preparation created a cultural diplomacy between all the participants leading to considerable economic and political cooperation. It tends to enhance the image of the Saudis and the Saudi State, making them appear attractive, civilized, and modern. It also tried to reconcile and change the image of Islam in the West by using objects of power such as the door of Mecca and departing from the strict doctrine of Wahhabism. The Saudi government's muteness about the repatriation the country's heritage objects from Germany, France or Britain, is intended to compromise political and economic cooperation. Economic expansion and prosperity needs stability and security, not easily found in a conflict-ridden Middle East, which the U.S. considers vital for its own national security. The exhibition strives to make the region appear attractive and secure for investment and tourism. The process of selecting objects to represent the golden past; giving them a specific narrative is a political process in itself.

Cultural heritage can be seen as a leverage for Saudi Aramco to advance its geopolitical agenda. Still, incalculable conflicts could be arising simultaneously when cultural heritage is used in a political context. Anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians should be aware of their culture-making as different groups are claiming the same heritage. Therefore, we should be aware of the usage of cultural heritage as a soft power for economic-political agendas, because the outcome could have unforeseen agendas and are not simply a one way street. Perhaps Archeologists, anthropologists and historians should beware of their work being used by governments and corporations to push a particular agenda behind the scenes of their cultural heritage projects.

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